

Introduction to the Special Issue: Public Policy

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Today we are living in a world of ever-deepening shadow, in which basic democratic values are challenged as never before and in which even the survival of the human species is at stake. Under these circumstances it makes sense to develop a strategy of using our limited intellectual resources for the defense and extension of our values. The term 'policy' is used to indicate the need for clarifying the social ends to be served by a given allocation (including self-allocation) of scientific energy. (Lasswell, 1948, p. 122)

Lasswell's 1948 depiction of a post-war society is credited as the birth of the policy sciences, the emergence of the study of the policy process and the beginnings of policy analysis. The interdisciplinarity of public policy has made for a rich diversity of frames, models, questions and approaches. Welfare economic models have been developed to improve the rationality and efficiency of decision making (Quade, 1976), economic models have been applied to questions of politics, behaviour and bureaucracy (Dunleavy, 1991), and management techniques have been imported into public administration (Pollitt, 1990).

The emergence of the study of public policy has also captured the imagination of those who 'share an interest in how individuals and organisations . . . arrive at judgments, make choices, deal with information, and solve problems' (Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987, p. 83). Accordingly, those interested in judgement, problem solving, discourse (Fischer & Forester, 1993), language (Edelman, 1967) and frames (Rein & Schön, 1993) naturally seek out suitable methodology through which to interrogate and mediate the policy sphere. It is no wonder, then, that policy analysis has lit on Q methodology.

For Durning, there are five ways in which Q can be used in policy studies, which include identifying policy preferences, understanding stakeholder interests, defining policy problems, undertaking policy

evaluation and capturing multiple moral judgements (Durning, 1999). Others emphasise the democratic potential of Q to identify constituencies to ensure those engaged in policy making represent a diversity of viewpoints, to identify common ground, and to bare conflict and even develop a common view towards the policy (Steelman & Maguire, 1999).

For researchers who traditionally use resource-intensive qualitative interviewing, Q offers an opportunity to systematise interpretive enquiry and analysis. For some the added quantification and factor analysis offers a degree of legitimacy, although this is not a universally held belief among interpretive scholars (Yanow, 2007). Although Q reveals the existence of shared perspectives within a population, it does not claim or seek to offer what proportion or how many hold such views. This was never the intent. However, some have used the results of Q studies to inform large-scale survey design (Brown, 2002; van Exel, de Graaf, & Brouwer, 2008).

In September 2011, the School of Government and Society at the University of Birmingham hosted the 27th annual Q conference. As conference hosts we took the opportunity to acknowledge, reflect on and celebrate the role of Q in public policy analysis in the pages of *Operant Subjectivity*. Drawing on policy issues and practice in the United States, Australia, England and the Netherlands, the four articles in this special issue have been selected to give a flavour of where policy analysis is taking Q and where Q is taking policy analysis.

Twijnstra and De Graaf's article re-examines our assumptions of public servant loyalty. Drawing on Q sorts of British and Dutch public administrators, they found five distinctive viewpoints giving primacy to law, creativity, society, line management, or profession. The analysis revisits and refreshes classical Weberian conceptions of public service and contributes to discussion of what it means to be a public servant in an era of hybrid governance.

Gaynor's article applies Q to explore stakeholder views of community-based organisations in the United States and their potential to meaningfully engage communities in the decisions that shape their local environments. Gaynor used a Q set based on Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation and two conditions of instruction, which made it possible to compare perceptions of current conditions against an ideal world. The findings speak to current discussion of community organising and coproduction.

Niemeyer, Ayirtman and HartzKarp show how Q can be combined with other techniques as part of a democratic deliberation exercise. This study is concerned with the future of a bridge in Australia and the multiple stakeholder groups differentially concerned by issues of safety,

efficiency, aesthetics, environment and heritage. Q is used both prior to and following a deliberative exercise, first to reveal competing perspectives and then to analyse any shifts in participants' policy preferences. The issue of stability of perspectives and the effect of deliberation on participants' viewpoints is an area with huge potential for future Q studies in public policy.

Cuppen's article outlines three uses for Q in policy analysis in the context of intractable ('wicked') policy issues, in this case, sustainable energy from biomass in the Netherlands. Cuppen uses Q to understand perspectives, select stakeholders for participation in a dialogue and for evaluation. Like Niemeyer et al (this issue), Cuppen shows us how Q can be used before and after a policy intervention, to show something of how subjectivity can shift around an issue.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue and agree that the articles herein showcase Q as an adaptable and powerful tool for policy analysis of many kinds. This special issue joins the growing number of recently published Q-based policy studies and suggests an optimistic future for Q as an adaptable mainstay of policy analysis and a compelling case for the integration of Q into policy evaluation and research design.

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